Yoke

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Yoke

by TheEternal (TheEternal_1)

Summary

He couldn't trust him with his nightmares, not until he had the act figured out. His gut instinct was rarely wrong.

And mostly, he wouldn't share that part of himself because he'd grown to care deeply about his opinion of him, and he wanted to be seen as a good man. All he ever wanted was to be a good man, yet his dreams told him otherwise. Sorely alone, just his and no one else's, because his soulmate was probably dead or non-existent. His dreams, the lid to a terrible soul.

(S1 Soulmate AU. You always have your soulmate's dreams mixed into your own, in different ways, but after you meet them, they dream the same. Nightmares are dominant.)

Notes

[yoke, intransitive verb: to become joined or linked]
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Loosely inspired by Slow Show - The National: *You know I dreamed about you for 29 years before I saw you / You know I dreamed about you, I missed you for 29 years.*

See the end of the work for more notes

Will keeps dreaming of cooking before a deer rams head first into him, or the ocean waves crashing against his toes and when he looks down its moss and ash and not the beach. He dreams of emptiness before swapping to crowded ballrooms. He dreams of music of another time and of birds the size of a castle. But he also dreams of being pushed off a rooftop, of a child's hand carving his heart out and offering it to his dogs, of being forcefully fed handfuls of snow until he can't breathe or swallow, waking in a pool of sweat and dry heaves.

Hannibal dreams of sinking into a lake as deep as the ocean, pink-shaded, the heat almost comforting; or the humm of a car, worn interior, looking through the window at superimposed cities he doesn't recognize, until they turn a corner and it's Paris. Doesn't know who he means by *they*. He dreams of standing in the middle of a creek, fishes swimming around his unsoaked argyle socks, until a familiar rifle peaks from between the foliage. He often doesn't remember the dreams, for a long time he had no interest to. After they'd started warping, it had taken him close to 5 years to realize what wasn't his. And he'd started actively dreaming. It had been 29 years since, and now, they weren't his anymore.

He dreamt of Cassie Boyle levitating in the air, bloodsoaked and covered as if on the morgue's table. Then gored and propped on antlers. It wasn't his. The dream wasn't his. He woke up serene, it was a beautiful scene, he'd loved to tweak it with an Aria as she ascended to the dark backdrop. His long slender fingers wrapped around the charcoal pencils by the nightstand.

Will woke drenched in sweat, too horrified to realize the dream had been entirely his own nightmare. He peeled off the offending shirt and went back, not remembering anything after it.

He didn't want to, either.

Blood on his hands, on her neck, on his glasses. Blood became part of his nightmare's landscape. Alone, too. Completely alone. Will started letting the dogs climb into the bed to offer comfort. He didn't want to acknowledge how only he could be having those surreal and poignant night terrors, and what it meant. Not now, not when he spent the nights in a chair of Abigail's room, searching for forgiveness in the daughter the world had thrusted upon him.

The weeks passed, cases rolled, nightmares prevailed. Singular, salt-soaked nightmares, leaving him with the aftertaste of rust on his tongue and his curls caked against his scalp.

Therapy sessions were in order, after Alana's not-quite-ambush. And as much as he could open his mind to the extraoficial psychiatrist, Hannibal Lecter made him willing to sink into a calm estate *(he's your paddle, your stability, your gauge)* but also forcefully kick and swim to the surface in panic *(non-judgemental but pressing, alienating you from Jack more often than not, his smiles feeling like a palm closing your eyes and tilting your head the other way, what could he possibly be hiding?)* He couldn't trust him with his nightmares, not until he had the act figured out. His gut instinct was rarely wrong.

And mostly, he wouldn't share that part of himself because he'd grown to care deeply about his opinion of him, and he wanted to be seen as a good man. All he ever wanted was to be a good man, yet his dreams told him otherwise. Sorely alone, just his and no one else's, because his soulmate was probably dead or non-existent. His dreams, the lid to a terrible soul.

He'd been running his fingers up and down the stag statue when the voice broke his thought process, like a thread being snapped.

"You seem particularly reluctant to initiate conversation today. Anything troubling you, Will?"

Will turned, the fireplace allowing only the outlines of the man moving his sketches and papers from the desk to the drawers.

"You know the answer to that."

He lifted his head, serious, nearing on blank, expression and yet a certain whimsy ever present in his burning sharp whiskey eyes. Sharp, as sharp as his blue suit or the scalpel between the pencil shavings.

"These cases, they disturb your sense of reality, of self. Perhaps you ought to tell Jack Crawford to give you a well deserving holiday."

If it had been anyone else, the words would've been ones of mockery. And yet, Hannibal concocted his sentences with such care it sounded like advice, caring and warm. Perhaps Will just wanted them to be warm; there was no way Jack would let him take time off. Lives were

at stake. His own life paled under the dozens they preemptively saved each week, each month. Jack was the good man here, knowing what to sacrifice, and Will, well, he didn't appreciate being the sacrifice, yet he knew it might be his only redemption.

"Serial killers don't take holidays, or at least, not to rest. There are just as many murders on the beaches than in the city, if not more."

He hid his guilt and sudden despondence quickly, turning away from Hannibal, heading towards the chairs (they were getting closer together, he wondered if it was truly accidental). Hands rubbing at his face, rubbing at the tears and sleep-deprivation welling right behind his frail skin.

As if he'd been reading his thoughts through the back of his skull, the older man prompted.

"It's your hour, Will, if you wish to just sit by the window, or perhaps, take a nap, be my guest."

"Is it that obvious?" smaller, way smaller than he'd intended.

"What is?"

"That I haven't slept."

He sank back into the seat, the soft air of the cushion being squeezed out mixed into the equally soft sigh that parted from his lips. Blue meets maroon from across the office, a head tilt, more warmth.

"I am more observant than the median, Will. I hope you didn't take it as an offense, as it was merely a suggestion."

“No, you’re right, I could use a nap without dog hair in my mouth.” He broke eye contact, self-conscious and acting maybe more frayed than he was, the vulnerability got him better results when it came to details and he needed to know what Hannibal was up to. He refused to believe the man simply enjoyed his company as much as he enjoyed his. “But just 20 minutes. Do wake me if I start stirring.”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. The question barging into the room, locking into place the answer to Will’s distrust.

“I am not talking about my dreams, Doctor Lecter.”

The other man smoothed his suit jacket, and finally sat down at his desk, fiddling with his pens.

“Simply curious, Will. It is not my intention to pry into that place, not yet at least.”

Taken aback by the boldness, he snapped. Not that he didn’t do that often. If anything, maybe that’s why Lecter liked him, he could see the stirring of an emotion akin to endearment each time he was borderline rude to his face.

“Would *you* discuss your dreams with *your* psychiatrist?”

“I often do, in fact.”

Smug bastard. I’m too tired for this. He let his neck find a comfortable position on the couch.

“20 minutes. Rest my eyes. Then you can help me crack this case open.”

“As you wish, Will.”

***

Autumn hardened into winter, and the harsh air did nothing for his sweat-ridden nights. He was sure he was going to feel sickly the next three months at this pace, and as much as he saw the question latched on the tip of his superior's tongue, he would never utter it. He was the lamb brought to the abattoir to secure the lives of the rest. Instead of being slaughtered once, a fine layer of muscle and skin was removed each time. Peeling him down to the bone, until the sacrifice was complete. Then, they'd have to find someone to spare them again. Someone to keep the herd as intact as it could be.

He figured Hannibal was doing a peeling of his own. Will was unraveling, and yet Hannibal insisted it was mental illness, it had to be, but no, there wasn't a name for what Will was, no therapy would expel this bouts of emptiness, the lost time, and he knew that much, he knew. Something had to be wrong with the brain. He knew what he was, as much as it was hard to admit.

"I'm getting a brain scan."

Hannibal nodded, signaling defeat, but it rang fake, so fake. Yet the worry in his eyes was as genuine as looks could go. Cognitive dissonance was getting more and more intrinsically linked into his sense of who Hannibal was, what he made him feel.

"Would you like me to accompany you?"

All defiance left him at the wake of that soft sentence. Unshed tears blurring his vision, This time he wasn't letting his emotions command him, Will was trying to reprimand himself for the way the other man made bare himself of the layers upon layers of protective film he had wrapped himself in. He was murky, not fully transparent, and yet Hannibal made him want to unwrap it all and decipher what was crawling and gurgling inside. The image of the other man holding a squirming, slick heart-like creature in his hand, soaking his manicured nails and staining his perfect suit with his blood was *too right.* He shuddered at the thought of those hands cracking his ribcage open to grasp it, too.

Will buried his head on his hands, knowing Hannibal was stepping towards the settee with the intention to sit besides him. The winter sun barely encasing him in light, a large shadow in his shape twisting the floor, it look like he had curling wide antlers, *you're not fooling*

anyone. His body wrecked in one long, ugly, sob, trembling yet knowing. Knowing he was going to tell him. He blinked and the shadow was normal again.

So far, Hannibal knew Will had been lying. Every morning, he'd wake and quickly sketch the dream his soulmate had. Will, oh his dear, sweet Will, despondent and self-flagellating due to the relentless morality imposed by society. If only he didn't fear his instincts, his righteous blood-seeking wants. He'd be more in touch with himself, more at ease. Less pliant and doubting, less likely to relegate himself under Crawford's well-intentioned albeit skewed pressure. He would love to guide him towards greatness, but he wasn't ready. How could he explain it without risking this façade? If Will reacted poorly... it would be a shame to have to kill his soulmate. And so, knowing his need for Will's attention and trust and presence in his life grew over this short time, it was of utmost importance to remain cautious. Depending on how severe his encephalitis got, he might be able to grant him all the tools to his becoming. A tease of what he is capable of doing, if only he believed himself to be beyond his smothering skin.

So when Will practically spilled his brains on him, he was surprised but relieved.

Wiping the snot and tears with a tissue Hannibal handed him, he stared expectantly. His tongue leadening after such harrowing retelling of gruesome violence, the type that he was terrified to find beautiful, the type he knew was just one step away from being filed as homicidal ideation, from probably forced institutionalization. Now he was crying not from Hannibal's care for him, but from the fact that he might also put him away. This was stupid. As he swam in those eyes, he knew how stupid it had been to tell the man his dreams, basically admit his soulmate had died before meeting him or worse, had never existed. All those surreal, mixed dreams before the job, when he was younger and better rested, they must have been his childlike wonder and imagination. Fairytales. The other man didn't seem to judge him and yet, it felt like he really had his hand on his heart, squeezing it like his dog's chew-toys. A mess, under the lack of words.

Hannibal's hand didn't leave his shoulder the whole time. It should've been sweaty and yet when it did leave, it looked dry. *Maybe he doesn't sweat because it's rude to his skin*, he mused, and an awkward laugh escaped his lips. Emotions oscillating wildly.

"Will-"

"I know, I'm unstable-"

“Will,” More firm, it stopped him dead in his tracks, “You carry around excessive amounts of shame, because you find it disturbing to be alone with these thoughts, correct?”

He nodded, it was partly because of knowing he was alone, yes. He didn’t know if having a soulmate would make it better.

“What if you were not?”

Will shook his head, from side to side, curls bouncing like coils.

“You can’t bear my burden, Hannibal.”

They remained in silence for a full beat. Then, Hannibal stood up, slowly, tentatively. As if Will would reach out to him, hold him down and to his side.

“Would you humour me by going through a couple of pages of one of my sketchbooks? If you are tired, I can assure y-”

“Show me.”

“It’s the one I dedicate to my dreams.”

Large, smooth black leather cover. It felt expensive to his rough palms, it obviously was. He wanted to object, maybe he wanted to try and convince him of… what? That violent dreams came with the job? That he also had nightmares like that?

“Ha-”

“I insist, and do take note of the dates.”

Will’s eyes were closer and closer to bulging out of his skull, with each page he turned. He was going backwards, from the most recent to the first. By the time he reached Cassie Boyle, her corpse hanging down from where the antlers gored her in the charcoal background, it had become too much. It was black and white, but he could see the blood and almost hear the rustle of the sheet that unveiled her with clarity. The black spine hit the floor with a dull thud.

Chastising himself he leaned down to grab it, still processing *the universe paired you with your psychiatrist, with the man that can't ignore your crazy, the universe paired you with a man who enjoys galas and five course meals and has more wealth that seems sensible.* It seemed cruel and hilarious, and too hopeful. Hannibal was not going anywhere by the fondness in his eyes. It had to be a trick. It had to be some sick joke.

Their hands grazed, and he realized they’d barely touched in their whole relationship. No, they’d never touched skin to skin. Electricity ran through his fingers, and he jerked away like the voltage had burnt. *It is real, this is real, not some sort of trick, but real, real, real.*

Hannibal didn’t utter a word as Will’s chest heaved. In reality, his would be heaving in the same fashion if he wasn’t so used to restraining himself. It was overwhelming, to be acknowledged. Will might not see all of him, but he saw enough, which explained why he had always been a little wary, and yet came back. Always came back to his door. His darkness tugged towards him, as he wished to find the light after seeing Hannibal’s own. **The night is bright, after all.**

“I’ll… I’ll let you know when my brain scan appointment is,” He stood up in a haze, almost tripping over himself as he picked his coat, “I’m sorry, I need to go home and-”

“I must admit I am quite shaken myself, but you don’t need to leave, Will,” there was something akin to rejection bubbling under that sentence.

“It’s a lot to process. I need space.”

“Could we at least have dinner tonight? I’ll bring it to your home, let me come to your space, and we can talk.” His eyes like plea, he had never seen him like this before.

“Hannibal, I can’t let you- I-” he took a lungful of air, trying to still his racing heart, why fight him on it? It was his house and he could tell him off if he wanted. He was giving him the upper hand, “Okey”

Hannibal smiled, but he could see a flimsy spark of disappointment, blink and you’d miss it. He’d grown accustomed to his microexpressions. Was that him being good at reading people or had it been a signal from the start? Will turned around to step out.

“I’ll see you tonight at 8, then?”

He didn’t turn around. If he turned around he would stay, and be the bee drowning in those honey eyes..

“Yeah, sorry.” and closed the door behind him.

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Will gripped the steering wheel, knuckles turning white. A thousand questions racing through. What now? Yes, a low percentage of soulmate couples were platonic, but they existed. Just because they were soulmates didn’t mean they had to do anything, be anything. But what were they, regardless? Friends? Abigail’s surrogate fathers? Doctor/patient? What would happen to their sessions? Not that Hannibal wasn’t one for the unorthodox but being your soulmate’s own therapist is bound to put a strain on any healthy relationship. Maybe neither of them was built for health. He knew how much meat the other man consumed, indulged in. He indulged in everything, but they say a good life is better than a long life. With his job, he might find neither to be true. One of these days the Chesapeake Ripper is going to realize they are onto him and turn him into a beautiful display-

Mid 40s/early 50s. Medical knowledge. Flair for the dramatic, poetic, sophisticated. Lots of free time. Calculating, patient, cautious, precise. Undisturbed by violence, or has a deep understanding of it. Hidden in plain sight. *Nobody knows what he is.*

Does it ring a bell? Fuck!

He parked outside his house and stayed in the car. A string of curses leaving his desperate lips as he hit his head against the steering wheel. His eyes had no more tears to shed, but if they had, they would've licked his cheeks like a flame. His throat got the brunt of this display of anger, of feeling blind, and betrayed. The irony of the universe assigning him, the unstable FBI agent, a calm and collected cannibalistic serial killer was not lost on him. One that was coming over with tupperwares full of delicious food made out of people, and probably treats for his dogs which also would be made out of people, and he was coming over to discuss the fact that they were soulmates of all things, and that maybe, just maybe, Will was okay with them being that.

With a groan of frustration sullied by his thrashed vocal chords, he stepped into the cold. It stung, *good,* he deserved it. As the dogs swarmed him, sniffing and milling around his feet in excitement, Will knew what he had to do.

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They talked amiably about nothing at all while they ate. It was delicious, and although Will would've preferred his last dinner not to be an act of cannibalism, the flavour was enough to override that part of himself. The fact that it didn't bother him as much as it should tugged at his heart, *soulmates, right?*

After he practically did everything but lick the plate clean, Will cleared his throat. Hannibal, taken aback by a gesture foreign to all of his experience of the other man, locked eyes.

"I know you're the Chesapeake Ripper. And the Copycat. So if this is the end, and don't you fucking dare lie to me about it, I'd like to know what you expect to do with me, recipe and tableau included."

"Will, I'd grown quite fond of you." *Was that a defeated sigh?* "Are you sure you want to follow this course of action?"

“Sure? I’m not sure of anything but I don’t think I can go back to pretending you are not who you really are. I’ve worn many skins, too many, but I can’t go back to the me I was yesterday,” fists turning into balls, pressure on his table, blazing eyes, “It’s too late, it doesn’t fit”

“No, you’ve outgrown it.”

Hannibal got up to take the plates nonchalantly, as if they were discussing the weather. Will followed, he guessed the small kitchen would fare better at cleaning his own blood.

“Maybe you’ve outgrown all of them.”

“What?”

Hannibal rolled the sleeves of his crisp white shirt. Will’s gut lurched at such a simple yet domestic sight. He picked the towel and started drying what he was handed. This… was not how he had expected this conversation to go.

“If you gave into the urges you've kept down for so long, cultivated them as the inspirations they are, you would become someone other than yourself. And by yourself I mean this skin you seem to be wearing, out of fear.”

“All I ever wanted was to be a good man. My father raised a good man.”

“Good and evil are arbitrary. Morality doesn't exist. If you would free yourself, you'd be more comfortable, and alive.”

“I don't want to live a lie.”

“You already are.”

Will let the last dish on the rack, taking in the other man next to him. Truly taking him in. The coiled muscles trapped underneath the tailored, fitted shirt, the movements in the silence. His gut instinct hadn't been wrong, never had. No matter how much his head hurt, or his sense of reality shifted, he knew. The man in front of him was an apex predator.

"I didn't think it was a lie until you barged into my life!" It wasn't his intention to lash out but his vision was swimming and he couldn't keep it at bay. His tongue ran loose. If he didn't know any better he would've thought the chef had poisoned the food.

"You have restraints. People might think a wolf in a muzzle behaves like a dog but it's still a wolf. It will tear the sheeps apart as nature dictates…"

Hannibal noticed the sway and offered his arm. Will just wanted to get this over with, but still let him guide him back to the chair.

"And you don't know what you are? Was it not in your nature to shoot Hobbs? Stammets? Budge?" Stern, drilling, but soothing, if it was possible. How could he possibly be soothing as he flayed his mind?

"You set Garret Jacob Hobbs up, didn't you? You called, you were curious."

Lips curled in an unspoken answer. Will couldn't help but laugh, mild-hysterics grating and startling the dogs.

"Was it that easy? You could take one look and half a breakfast conversation and tell there was this howling beast inside of me?"

"I hoped I was correct in those assumptions about you, yes. just as you hoped you were mistaken about yours."

“Are you confessing, Doctor Lecter? I should-”

“A good man by your standards would’ve called Jack already to have me arrested. This is nothing but a fantasy, Will. It pains me to see you cling to it.”

He reached closer to the shivering man, and saw how he flinched. But immediately relaxed back, flashing one of his trademark sorrowful smiles.

“Might be wiser not to fight, you're my soulmate after all,” he panted, he might black out at any moment but not knowing why. What was happening to him?

“I have never expected you to surrender, Will. Not to your death, nor your becoming. Only to allow me to guide you out the chrysalis. Once you are out, your actions are beyond me.”

“Will the Chesapeake Ripper continue making art out of pigs?”

“He might.”

“It's not a compulsion.”

“Do you wish for him to stop?”

He swallowed harshly, half-lidded. Sentences crashing into place, hazy but there, full, needing the answers, needing to be honest, as honest as he could: “N-no. But you know that already, if not I wouldn’t be so resigned to the idea you’re going to dispose of me. How will you have me displayed? What do you plan to take to your table? You must have thought about it before, even though you knew we were each other's right from the start.”

“It was a possibility I had to entertain. I would've taken your brain and your heart, but only to myself,” he brushed a cool thumb around the crease of his forehead. Then his whole palm. Will leaned into the touch unconsciously.

Hannibal leaned in, whispering. This was a conversation for them only. And it gave him the chance to smell him again. The heavy sweetness imposing on top of the cologne and the dog scent.

"I would have filled such cavities to the brim with Dianthus barbatus, softly taped your eyes open, and hung you with golden wires like a solar disc in your own classroom. An all seeing, all feeling God."

Will shuddered.

"Would have?"

"I'm not going to kill you, Will. It must sound strange to you but I don't think I can. As you said so yourself once, life would be much more dull without you, without our conversations. I've never had anyone else whom I enjoyed their presence as much as I do yours. I would miss you… terribly."

His frame was shaking violently, and he slided an arm out to coax him closer. His hand was scorching, more than his forehead.

He rested his head against his neck, more sparks flying. Prolonged touch with your soulmate was known to produce such intense sensations. Hannibal, noticing that Will was succumbing to a fever, wanted to let go, they could experience this later. Preferably after his encephalitis was addressed. The other man did not budge.

"Will-"

"Shut up and let me hug you, Mr. Darcy."

Oh, he was truly delirious. Then he fell on top of him, stiff. Convulsing.

His illness could produce seizures. It had been a miracle he hadn't had one already, *while driving*. Hanibal felt a rather unwelcomed pang of guilt, which he brushed aside, before calling an ambulance.

***

Hannibal was pleasantly surprised to find all of Will's dreams are dominant for behind closed eyes he feels Winston's soft fur, and lulling river streams. While the man is in the hospital he dreams of fishes flying in the air before the earth opens and swallows him whole. But there is no panic, no lingering anguish. The earth is comforting and warm and slick in honey. There's a mirror that doesn't work, dog teeth scattered at the grott's door. He walks around the Hieronymus Bosch-like landscape and wonders. Wonders if he'll always be privy to such a rich environment.

Will was under aggressive treatment for his NMDAR-Encephalitis, helping to the loosening of his tongue. Or perhaps he figured that was the only time he could say it and justify it to himself. Stubborn thing. But telling him he was not going to interfere with his lifestyle as long as he didn't interfere with his was enough. Will would join him, later, at his own pace, but he would. He knew he would.

***

"Please tell me you didn't know I had encephalitis." Will slurs through gritted teeth. The medication is starting to wear off but it made him woozy for a long time. Head lolling to the side, where Hannibal stood. Coat folded over his arm, matching his dark suit.

"I suspected it, but didn't have solid evidence, besides your scent. And I was curious whether your hallucinations were from stress mixed with an active imagination or something else entirely."

He groaned and closed his eyes.

“If I wasn't hooked to all this I would be trying to choke the life out of you.”

Hannibal’s eyes widened, and a smile crept through his face, lupine and genuine.

“Don't sell yourself short, Will. With your strength you could very well strangle me.”

Will opened his eyes just to roll them, realizing the other man had no intentions of sitting in the chair Alana had been warming earlier.

“Are you here to take me home? Doctors said I could leave today.”

“If you wish. They’ve informed me the paperwork will be done in half an hour."

***

Will noticed immediately, but he coaxed the dogs out before addressing it.

“That's not the lure I was working on.”

“I knocked it out of its place when I came to feed the dogs,” Which wasn’t a lie, he *had* knocked it out of place with the bowl in his hand, but it had been, however, very much intentional.

“You also dusted the place and rearranged my knife block?“

Before he could answer, he sidestepped. The cogs turning behind the no longer inflamed brain.

“Hannibal,” he started, sweet danger dripping from every syllable. “Were you going to pin the Copycat murders on me?”

“It was preemptive. I got rid of the evidence already.”

And to that, Will lunged forwards, effectively tackling him to the ground. There wasn’t much space on the floor, and thankfully the dogs were outside. One hand fisting the collar of his red shirt, the other on his shoulder to keep him down. Hannibal was strangely submissive. Would he take the blow or would he roll him over? The train of thought was cut off by-

"If you wanted me underneath you, all you had to do was ask."

He stared at him, blue darkening like a storm, tilting his head, and mirroring the owner of the expensive suit he had pinned to the dirty floor.

"Do you get off on the violence?"

"Just yours."

Feeling better than he had in years he leaned down, grasping the lapels of his charcoal suit. Making him meet him halfway, both already smiling as lips were hovering tantalizingly over lips.

"Then fight me."

End Notes

feedback is encouraged!

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